

**"MY HEART ALWAYS SWELLS WHEN I THINK OF THE GREAT DISTANCE  
NOW BETWEEN US": GEOGRAPHY AND DISTANCE IN FIVE VICTORIAN  
TEXTS IN SPC LIBRARY ARCHIVES**

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**ABSTRACT:** The archives of Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) library contain five texts on travels to the Pacific region by mid-to-late Victorian-era women. This paper gives a personal reading of the five texts, with observations on how the authors imaginatively conceive geography and space, the status of women, and the role of religion in the colonial project of the era. It is not a research paper. The texts are Mrs. Edgeworth David's *Funafuti Or Three months on a coral island: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (1899); Sarah S. Farmer's *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of their Mission History written for young people* (1855); Emma Hadfield's *Among the Natives of the Loyalty Group* (1920); Dora Hort's *Tahiti, The Garden of the Pacific* (1891); and Maggie Whitecross Paton, *Letters and Sketches from The New Hebrides* (1894 2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Three of the women write on missionary journeys, one writes on a voyage to test Darwin's coral atoll theory, and another writes of a voyage taken simply to satisfy curiosity. The texts share the Victorian epistemological tendency to a taxonomical ordering of the natural world and they contribute both to their contemporary discussion of imperialism and to the Victorian debate on the "Woman Question."

**KEYWORDS:** [LCSH] Travel writing – History – 19<sup>th</sup> century; Women travelers – Oceania – History– 19<sup>th</sup> century ; Women travelers – Correspondence; Travelers' writings, English – Oceania; Tuvalu – History – 19<sup>th</sup> century; Vanuatu – History—19<sup>th</sup> century; French Polynesia –History—19<sup>th</sup> century; Tonga – History--19<sup>th</sup> century.

The archives of Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) library house SPC publications, videos, audio-cassettes, CD-ROMs, 16mm films, mid-twentieth century photographs, and a few mid-to-late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century books. Among that small collection of old books are five texts by women, which this paper will address and consider. The texts are Mrs. Edgeworth David's *Funafuti Or Three months on a coral island: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (1899); Sarah S. Farmer's *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of their Mission History written for young people* (1855); Emma Hadfield's *Among the Natives of the Loyalty Group* (1920); Dora Hort's *Tahiti, The Garden of the Pacific* (1891); and Maggie Whitecross Paton, *Letters*

*and Sketches from The New Hebrides* (1894 2<sup>nd</sup> ed). This paper is not a research paper; it offers a personal reading of these texts. I will briefly introduce each of the five texts and then discuss the text as an engagement between the women themselves and their Victorian society at home. I will first look at the missionary literature of Farmer, Hadfield and Paton, and then turn to the travel literature of Hort and David. The paper is given its boundaries by serendipity—merely by the fact that these texts are housed in SPC library archives. The circumstances of how they came to the SPC collection are unknown. The texts are to date uncatalogued. Though these books are all available in the National Library of Australia, or the Library of Congress, I think they merit discussion because a quick search of essential indices shows very little critical work on these women's lives or their writings.

Caroline Edgeworth David, the exception to this statement, while well known in her lifetime has now fallen into obscurity, even in Australia (Carter 2002). Caroline David is an English woman who had emigrated to Australia when she was a young single woman for "reasons of health" (Carter 2002). In *Funafuti*, she accompanies her husband, a professor of geology, for three months in 1896 to Funafuti (Tuvalu) in order "to prove whether the great Darwin's coral atoll theory was true or not" (p.1). Farmer is English, and her text is not so much a travel narrative as a history of the Christianization of Tonga. Hadfield and her husband are English missionaries to the Loyalties from the 1890s onward. Hort is American; she accompanies her husband, who owns a shipping line, on an extended business trip merely to satisfy her curiosity to see the reputed beauty of Tahiti. Whitecross Paton is British, and again the wife of a missionary. These women and their texts, happen to represent a good cross-section of the Victorian era : the lower-middle income missionary supported by the London Missionary Society; the solidly middle-class intellectual; and the affluent and independent industrialist. These women travel and write in the period known as "high imperialism", approximately 1850 to 1930. Their travel and missionary narratives reflect the colonial initiative to expand authority by occupying the cognitive as well as the national and geographic space of a colony (Kahn 2003). The three missionary literatures work within this colonial imperative. In Farmer, I find a conflation of Christianity with trade. In Hadfield, I find a nuanced and conflicted belief in the advantages of Christianity for Lifu. In Paton, I concentrate on the use of language and find another conflict, this time between personal sacrifice and her missionary duty. The two travel texts of Hort and David, speak to the contemporary Victorian debates on the "Woman Question" and the rise of science as a belief system. All the texts share the Victorian tendency to classify the natural world. All are impressed with the vastness of Pacific geography. All the women, despite the ostensible motive for the voyage being undertaken, write texts that reveal as much about the writer as about the islands they describe. As travelers have always done, and continue to do, these women experience the otherness of the foreign, reflect on those experiences, and through their texts come to question the limits of culture and identity.

Sarah S. Farmer's *Tonga and the Friendly Islands with a Sketch of their Mission History written for young people* (1855) is the least readable and the most pedantic text among the collection. Although Farmer's "main object" is the Christianization of Tonga, she is

preoccupied by geography. The introduction chronicles the history of European geographical exploration from the Greeks to the Victorians and places contact with Pacific Islanders as the latest and greatest attainment of the voyages of discovery. Farmer understands the process of Christianization in the Pacific as a necessary precursor to the great reward of imperialism-- trade. She observes that she "cannot look at the ocean, with its strong waves and ceaseless flow, without thinking what a formidable hindrance it is to the intercourse of nations and persons" (p.8). This intercourse is, of course, commercial and the vast geography of the Pacific region is both the obstacle and the means of access to new markets. New markets must be prepared to be able to trade and Farmer sees religion as the preparatory step. To her interpretation, the introduction of Christianity has benefited the Tongans by making them more competent to conduct trade. Since Christianity, "all parents are required to send their children to school; the people have a written language and books" (p.416) and the children learn geography. That is, geography not as a study of the region, but as instruction on how to leave the region. Each Tongan learns how to accurately trace on a map the course that a ship "must take on her return voyage to England" (p.387). Able to read, write and do sums in English, the Christianized Tongans are ready not only to engage with the God but also with the commerce of England.

While Farmer admits there is no direct need for an increase in production of agricultural products because the "few wants of the islanders themselves are readily met" (p.420) and there is "no market for native produce," she urges that with an increased cultivation and the subsequent increase in production of desired products an export market could be found. She suggests that the Tongans produce cotton to be sold to England. Almost her last words are a description of the visit to Sydney by King George of Tonga (p.420). Farmer's hope for this visit is that "it may lead to the establishment of relations of commerce between that flourishing colony and the islands" (p.420). For Farmer, Tonga's Christianization is a process of preparation for entry into the material world of exchange, upon which England depends.

Like Farmer, Hadfield's missionary text on the New Caledonian Loyalty Islands, *Among the Natives of the Loyalty Group*, (1920) conforms to the Victorian era's assumption that Christianization is automatically amelioration within a moral hierarchy. Hadfield appears clinical to the point of dryness. She removes herself from the narrative voice and she erases her husband entirely except for the obtuse mention of "our arrival" on Lifu in the opening sentence. Employing the voice of the Victorian empiricist she offers, as do all the other writers I look at except Hort, classified observations on the customs, vegetation, work, language and mythologies of the islanders. She lists and she quantifies. She provides facts, measurements, vocabulary and points of etiquette. She gives techniques for fishing, extracting oil from the Xutrepet tree, and midwifery. She seeks to provide empirical evidence by which the English mind will meet the Lifuan mind.

I have endeavoured to put my readers in close touch with Loyalty Island native mentality. No man is really able to know the inner workings and motives of another man's conduct. But if we understand

his surroundings which determine his thoughts and actions, we may perhaps be able to form a good idea of his character and the place he occupies in the human scale (p.x).

The language at once recognizes a hierarchical ordering of moral conduct, but Hadfield also calls for her readers to approach her subject with tolerance. When taken in its entirety, the striking feature of Hadfield's work is internal conflict. This assertion is not to suggest that Hadfield does other than write with the vocabulary of the colonist. She does. There is a "quaint" folklore, decidedly lower than the literature of the colonialist, for example. But on closer reading, as the text progresses, Hadfield reveals that instead of being remote from the Lifuans, she is touched by them and is actually in some degree of conflict over her role among them. The beauty of the local folklore and the artistry of the local storyteller move her, for example, to almost humbled emotion. At another instance, with seeming neutrality, she reports incidents of torture of a woman accused of witchcraft-induced deaths of children (p.146) and of the suicide of a man accused of possessing a "haze"—which Hadfield explains is a fetish object with magical powers (p.159)—that has supposedly caused disease in another man. She then proceeds to relate that she has a number of fetish objects in her own collection, which betrays an interest in them that is unrevealed by her taxonomical language. Moreover, I find in her text wistfulness and nostalgia for pre-Christian culture.

She repeatedly contrasts the past in the "native" culture with the present, to the detriment of her present time. She uses the technique of comparing traditional lifestyle to what has been instituted as proper "in these more enlightened days" (p.185) of Christianity. When read in conjunction with the nostalgia that Hadfield conveys as she admits wistfully that "it is of old times I speak" (p.23), the recurrent "enlightened" times becomes burdened with undercutting connotations. Whether it is recording the "communistic" lifestyle of sharing food and goods (p.26) or of the time she recalls that she "looked in vain for the picturesque little canoes sailing up and down the lagoon. Alas! Not one was to be seen; they have all been superseded by the white man's boat" (p.103), she reveals a sentimental longing for pre-Christian days. This sentiment conflicts with her Christian mission and serves to take the text out of the genre of simple missionary history and reshape it as memoir.

Whether we regard them in the light of past history or present conditions, we find much that is worthy of admiration. We cannot fail indeed to recognize that they have very much in common with ourselves and to observe that the spirit of altruism is not the sole monopoly of the "white man from the clouds" (p.222).

Hadfield has confronted humanity in a place very different from that which she is accustomed. For Hadfield, I venture to suggest, the thirty years that she passes in the Loyalties create an internal space that is conflicted and unresolved about what it is to be enlightened.

The last missionary text to consider is that of *Letters and Sketches from the New Hebrides* (1894) by Maggie Whitecross Paton. It is a personal epistolary collection rather than a proselytizing narrative as are the other two. Paton's text suffers from the editing of her no doubt well-intentioned brother-in-law, Reverend James Paton, who admits in his introduction to the text that he "prepared and arranged every page" (p.vii). The Patons left Great Britain in 1864, arriving in Sydney 27 December 1864, in Aniwa in the New Hebrides in 1865 and remaining there, except for visits to other islands and to Australia, till August 1881. The letters written during this residence on Aniwa are characterized by loneliness, emotional isolation and a profound private pain that is unrecompensed by outward missionary duty. To her beloved sister she writes how "my heart always swells when I think of the distance now between us" (p.1). This affecting phrase encapsulates much of her emotional experience. I will look at Paton's language and in particular, the use of "civilization" and "home" as tropes of longing and desire for that is familiar to her.

Paton understands the importance of language. Throughout the text she wrestles with the act of writing. How to translate experience into words that will create a world in the imagination of a reader who is in a social and physical environment entirely remote from her own? She struggles to "find language to describe it to my sister at home" (p.3). It is her understanding of the power of language to create cognitive space that motivates her to try to keep an English mental landscape in her children by controlling their language acquisition. She "strove hard to keep them from learning Aniwan, for the sake of their morals, but could not manage it with Native servants all about" (p.109). She has no such fear for her own morals; she finds learning the language "quite fascinating" (p.67). She recognizes the barrier of isolation created by her early lack of Aniwan. "I so long to be able to talk freely to them" (p.79), she says of the women in her sewing classes. It is fitting that at the close of the text, when the Patons return to the New Hebrides for a six-month visit in 1889 after a separation of eight years, she is touched to record a conversation with a "dear old woman" whose own daughter is on another island and who says to Paton,

You used to smile, when you spoke of your Children in the far-off land,  
when we knew your heart was crying out for them. *We knew the  
language of your heart, Missi*, though you tried to hide it from us, and  
we Mothers often cried about you!! (p.379).

That mythical "far-off land", as the "dear old woman" understood perhaps better than did Paton herself, lives in the mind of Paton as "Civilization." Civilization and home are conflated and both are unreachable. A definition of "Civilization" is never articulated, though I derive a meaning of it from her text as having to do with the surface covering of things and people, the style of things—a kind of patina. Paton speaks of crowded streets in Adelaide, of shop windows, of the velvet of a church altar, and of clothes. To Paton, the sign that the "savages" of the New Hebrides are being civilized is when they begin to wear western dress and to be ashamed of their nakedness (p.177). She makes her local cook "much more civilized" (p.89) by insisting he wear a kilt, and cut his hair short. Throughout the text, Paton continues to "think how nice it would be to be in Civilization"

(p.182). One year, a trip to a doctor in New Caledonia gives her a "little peep into Civilization" (p.68) and another year she admits that she consoles herself in her loneliness with dreaming of her sensations when next she will walk "the streets of Civilization." When on a trip to Adelaide to visit family, her Ainwa maid sees the comforts of Australian life and sobs to her "Missi, I never knew what you had given up to come to our Dark Land! . . . I fear, I fear, you will never go back to our Dark Land again" (p.120). Paton has represented Litsi's language as correct English whereas elsewhere throughout the text, the Islanders speak in transcribed "Sandal-wood English", usually to an intended humorous effect. The intended effect here is pathos, and yet the incident would not have been anglicized unless it accords with Paton's own thoughts. Equal with this longing for home and "civilization" is regret for the missionary life that has taken her so far from home.

During a visit to the missionary settlement on Tanna, Paton is moved to tears by the beauty of a hymn sung by "little band of Missionaries so far from kindred and country, and about to separate for their lonely homes, and we knew not how much trial awaiting them!" (p.297). The hymn, in fact, is the locus of her loneliness and becomes a metaphor of emptiness across great space.

"Resignation" is the word she uses to describe the state to which she will discipline her feelings should any of her five sons have the missionary calling (p.301). It is true, it seems that she does not have the "Missionary sentiment" (p.249) of her husband, rather her understanding of missionary work is expressed in terms of separation and loss: "we had come down at such a sacrifice to health and family ties to devote our whole time to the work" (p.269). Nor is this feeling confined to herself. When she meets a new missionary wife, her pleasure is tempered with empathy that

she too had given up home and friends and everything, to come here for  
Christ's sake, with her husband, where there was not a soul to cheer  
and comfort them" (p.32-33).

The empathy she expresses for another she must also feel for herself and this emotional coloring contribute to the creation of a mythical and absent Home. The expression of her empathy for other lonely missionary wives also serves to make clear the contribution of the missionary to the empire and to Christianity. I do not mean that she intends to be self-laudatory. Rather, it is possible that she is participating through her text in the construction of an ideal of the missionary wife as it would have been collectively understood in the body of missionary literature. It is also possible that she is unaware that her apparent pietism resonates with something very close to resentment. There is frequent disjunction between what she asserts and what she implies, which supports the idea that she is unaware of what she implies to her reader. Though her correspondence is generally positive and optimistic in tone, most tellingly, at the end of her text, she writes

I do not know how it is, and can't account for such feelings, as my own  
Mission life was decidedly happy, but it is always like to break my



heart, to see any other Missionary and his wife left on a lonely island (p.375).

She does not, or cannot, fully understand herself. She recognizes her losses, and these have been profound: while on Aniwa of two of her children have died, she herself has been very ill during and after each of her eight pregnancies, and during her absence from home her sister and mother have died and she is remote from all that she values. She feels her prevalent sadness. Ultimately, a reading of her text reveals that she creates an imaginative idealized "civilization" in order to reconcile the dissociation of her inner life from that of her physical existence.

Farmer, Hadfield and Paton represent the proselytizing need of British religious imperialism to transform the exotic and the "other" into a reflection of the British. These texts are a function of ideological and historical parameters that are embedded in their era. In contrast, the two other texts that I have found represent the traveler's desire to know the exotic for its own sake. This genre of travel writing was immensely popular in the long Victorian era, and it was a genre in which women were successful commercially. These travel texts transcend their era because they reveal candidly and generously the women who wrote them.

Dora Hort's text is unusual in its candor and its centering of self in the text. Her text, *Tahiti, The Garden of the Pacific* (1891) is concerned with Tahiti's effect on her, not with Tahiti as an isolated object to be observed and quantified. Her voyage begins in San Francisco, with her husband, "A--", who owns a shipping line. They sail to Tahiti, then Chile, Australia, New Zealand and back to Tahiti. Though Hort does not specify the dates of her voyage, from references to Isaac, whom she deduces is an escaped slave (p.9-10) followed by a later reference to the "great victory won by the Federals" (p.148), I guess that the voyage commences in the early to mid 1860s. From references to Queen Pomare, who reigned from 1818-77, (Campbell 1990) and to H.R.H. Prince Alfred's arrival on the *Galatea*, which was in 1869, I guess that she leaves Tahiti for the last time shortly after 1869. During these years, we learn much of Hort, for she is the main character of her text.

Her text reads as if it were a novel and she the hero. She introduces characters that play minor but necessary roles in the text, who move the action forward and who reveal themselves as the text develops. We learn to know Hort. We learn that she loves animals, as she devotes nearly as much text to her horse and her various dogs as she does to people. We learn that she has humor and that she can laugh at herself. When she suspects sailors of having lured away her pet dog, she wants A—to write a

paragraph to be inserted in the next morning's paper, offering a suitable reward for my Finessa, over the composition of which we had an argument as I objected to his applying the term "slut" to my pet, and he ridiculed my suggestion of female dog (p.318).

We learn that she has unresolved regrets and that she grapples with aging. A polite comment on her preference of country rather than urban life, made in passing to Hort by a new acquaintance in Sydney, causes a long digression in Hort's text to her own rural childhood. She closes this digression with the observation that when she and A— visited her childhood home, time and development had changed all, and "what he saw was very different to what I had described" (p.126). Here and elsewhere in the text, Hort is aware that remoteness in time is as insurmountable as the great distances across the Pacific ocean. Hort often has recurrence to memories in *Tahiti, The Garden of the Pacific*, thus creating the idea that as she encounters an unfamiliar world she begins to turn inward to assess who she is, and how she has come to be where she is as a person. She asks, "Is it a dream, and not a reality, that far-off time, when I wandered [...], between groves of fragrant trees, by limpid streams and flowing rivers in the sunny island of Tahiti?" (p.35-36). During her voyage in Oceania, Hort's identity is challenged by the experiences brought about by movement through time and across geography. Because she speaks in the honest language of the self, rather than the didactic language of religion, it succeeds where the missionary texts fail in creating interest and bringing her subject alive.

We also learn that Hort is concerned with the social and political issues of her day. She enters into the Victorian-era debate on the "Woman Question" when her text is taken as a whole, though she rarely addresses the status of women directly. On a personal level, Hort constantly transgresses gender boundaries. She is unencumbered by children and she seems to guard her independence carefully (Gergits 2000). She is critical of and easily bored with society's trivialities and she allows herself to flaunt the rules of social interaction that she might well have followed at home. She writes that on arrival in Papeeti, "I found that etiquette required me to call on the ladies. I suppose I ought to have done so, but I didn't" (p.50). The same disregard for gendered behavior allows her to center her text solely on herself, on her opinions and her impressions. She does not even name her husband. He is always A—. She typically revels in defying his advice, even though he has lived in Tahiti previous to their joint voyage. She speaks of him fondly, and with humor, but he is merely the conduit for her travels; the impetus for her travels is her curiosity, and the point of view of her text is entirely her own. She develops a powerful persona through her narrative voice that is unequivocal in its attitude toward its audience.

She speaks with authority, and does not shrink from giving her opinion on politics and government, commerce and trade. We learn she is anti-missionary, anti-Catholic, anti-colonial and anti-French. Hort's commentary on the French Protectorate is scathing; she is contemptuous of the governorship of M. de la Ronciere of Tahiti on personal and ideological levels. She portrays Queen Pomare's as courageous and sympathetic. Significantly, it is photographs of Queen Pomare and her husband, Ariifaite that are included in the frontispiece of the text. The inclusion can only be read as a validating and supportive statement of the political situation of the Queen and Tahiti. The democratic underpinning of Hort's opinions combine with the personal freedom she demands—she explores much of Tahiti alone on horseback, for example—and with her expressed indifference to gender roles to give the decided impression that Hort's voyage is a time of



great personal liberty. That she then publishes her text further politicizes it, and places it among the voices discussing the limits and constraints on female gender behavior. Through *Tahiti*, Hort reveals much of who she is before the voyage and who she became during the voyage. Through *Tahiti*, Hort creates an enduring character in the history of Pacific voyages.

Caroline David, in her text, *Funafuti Or Three months on a coral island: An Unscientific Account of a Scientific Expedition* (1899) also addresses the "Woman Question" but unlike Hort, David's discussion of it is direct and pointed.

Though David's language is chatty, casual and light-hearted and though she states emphatically that hers is not a literary text, her intention--to raise interest in the islands "to enlist sympathy for the Funafutians, and perhaps be indirectly the cause of securing a medical missionary for the island" (p.ix)--is a serious intention. By medical missionary she means a secular, visiting doctor to instruct the Funafutians in modern health practices. She pursues this goal despite obstacles placed by missionaries because David, as a late Victorian intellectual, believes in the efficacy of science. David's knowledge of public health is evident and she acts as an impromptu doctor while on the island and gains "fame as a medicine woman" (p.123). Appalled at the pandemic of ringworm and skin disease, she ineffectually tries to convince the Funafutians of basic public health and hygiene. "For the first time I wished myself a missionary; they will obey a missionary" (p.56). She claims both to understand and privilege science over religion as a way of interpreting the natural world, and in this she is symptomatic of the Victorian age. When religion interferes with science, she shows that she is decidedly contemptuous of the missionary movement. One of her scientific responsibilities is to collect traditional tattoo patterns and she learns, much to her disapproval, that the missionaries have forbidden tattooing so only old women retain tattoos. This is another instance in which her bias to science allows her to openly criticize religious missionaries.

David follows the familiar pattern of classifying the natural world, but she does not pretend to be encyclopedic. Rather, she focuses on the domestic. She concentrates on those aspects of life that were still within the late Victorian female sphere—food collection and preparation, child-rearing, morals, manners, clothes, family structure, courtship, marriage, social hierarchy, education, music and amusements. She incorporates one chapter of Funafutian songs and another one of stories, which she has had one of the islanders write in Funafutian and a Samoan pastor translate. She has a mandate to collect and identify plants, which was within the acceptable sphere for women, especially as she uses it as a segue for her to develop relationships with local women. Her adopted Funafutian mother, Tufaina, and a young woman, Tavau, teach her the names and uses of local plants. Photographs accompany *Funafuti*, and these photos are of the people who become her friends, of the village huts and of domestic scenes—two women cooking, two girls eating, a family portrait, and of the hut where she lives. Her use of humor and self-deprecation and her emphasis on the personal are all typical elements of Victorian female travel writing (Kahn 2003) and belie the serious intent of her text.

However she appears to conform cheerfully to expected gender parameters, David also confronts gender roles. In the final chapters she turns to the scientific aspect of the voyage, but uses the details she presents to raise gender questions. Her reference to Darwin's call for a "doubly rich millionaire" to provide funds to prove his coral atoll theory, allows her to remind readers that this millionaire is a "wealthy woman of Sydney (Miss Eadith Walker)" (p.292). In this chapter, her light tone is almost derisive of scientific academia because, she implies, of its misogynist prejudices. She personalizes this prejudice by recording Dr. David's "quiet smile of scorn" for her "feminine ignorance" (p.301) when she is concerned about overweighting a raft. The raft capsizes. Throughout this sequence, she bestows the ironic title of "the leader" on Dr. David. It is only when he comes ashore again, soaked and humiliated, and admits he is wrong that David then refers to him again as "my husband." The neutral language of "the leader" by its conjunction with failure becomes a derogatory term. The possessive "my husband" that is typically used to imply a traditional female to male hierarchical relationship is inverted when the man admits the woman has better judgment than his own. When inverted, it becomes a challenge to that same gendered hierarchy. This episode is given even more potent irony in the light of the fact that Caroline David was the driving force behind the scientific and academic success of her husband who was renowned for reaching the South Magnetic Pole in 1909 (Carter 2002). This chapter is also used as an opportunity to note the value to ethnography and to science of the tattoo patterns and botanical samples she collected.

As a whole, the text addresses what David calls "the much-vexed question as to what is essentially man's work, or woman's work" (p.152). She is confronted by a group of people who share work without seeming regard to gender roles. She observes that "women usually made the hats, mats, titi, takai" (p.154) while the men usually did the "deep-sea fishing, made hooks and line, and cut timber" (p.154). Ultimately, "it seemed the custom for man or woman to do any piece of work that was needed" (p.154). In another context she refers again to the "perfect equality in the island as regards food and methods of cooking" (p.202). She tries to rationalize this astounding arrangement with the rather bitter excuse of cultural difference that "[P]erhaps if they had to work as hard as white people do they would be a little more particular" (p.154). Throughout the text she refers on several occasions to the amount of rest a Funafutian woman finds in each day (see, for example, p.168,205). The contrast between English and Funafutian women is always in the forefront of David's work. David relates in her chapter on "Clothes and Plants" that the women were interested in examining her clothes and looking at fashion plates. She discovers that they are equally fascinated by and contemptuous of the style of corseting waists. The Funafutian women understand the corruption of the natural body: one woman points to David's waist then to the waist of the woman in the illustration, and says "with great emphasis, 'white woman palenti big fool, tie up belly all tight, bine-by not goody in-a-side!'" (p.225). David's reaction is "I felt bound to defend my countrywomen, and explained that though the pictures were all made like that, only a very few English women were silly enough to squeeze themselves that way" (p.225). She has traveled thousands of miles across ocean only to be confronted with the home question of inescapable gender inequalities. That she is alive to these inequities she

shows not only by her answer but by her text's preoccupation with all that is strikingly egalitarian in Funafutian society.

The journeys to the islands of the South Pacific chronicled in these texts have made the women who record them confront themselves and their own cultures. Different from the island women they encounter they-- with the exception of Farmer who does not question-- come to question themselves and their cultures. To resolve the challenges and crises they find themselves in at great geographical and metaphorical distance from home, they turn to Christian determinism, imagination, memory and science for answers. The vast space of the ocean, punctuated only by small dots of land is the recurrent description that prompts the women to grapple with the self in the midst of immense geography. This same geographical condition is one that technology can only partially overcome even today.

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